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BECKMAN, WELCH AND THOMPSON STORE

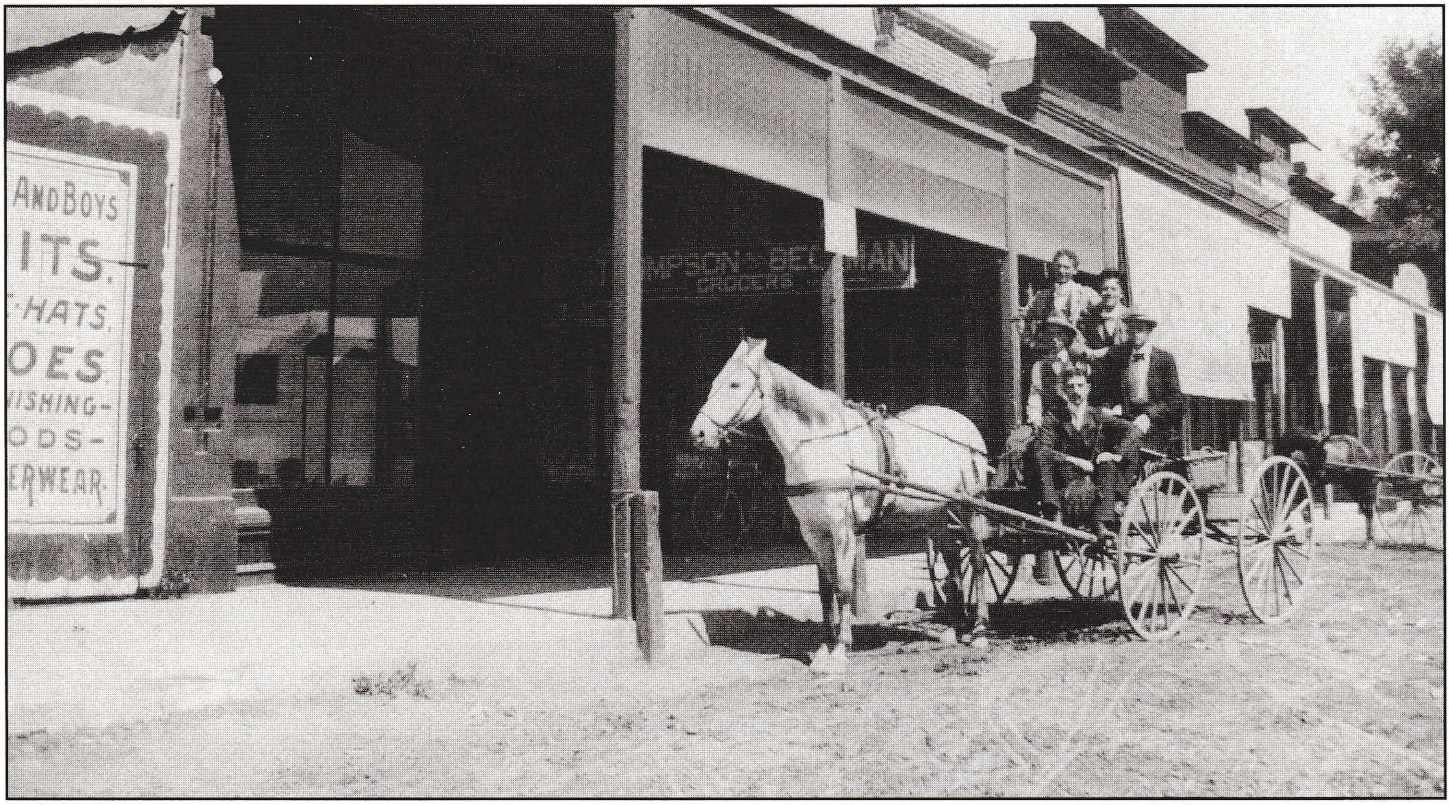
by Ralph Lea & Janice Roth

Frank W. Beckman, Hilliard E. Welch and Wilson H. Thompson were the three young men of Lodi who started a grocery store on south Sacramento Street that expanded to include a large hardware and later a farm implement department. All three became successful businessmen and leaders in the affairs of the Lodi community.

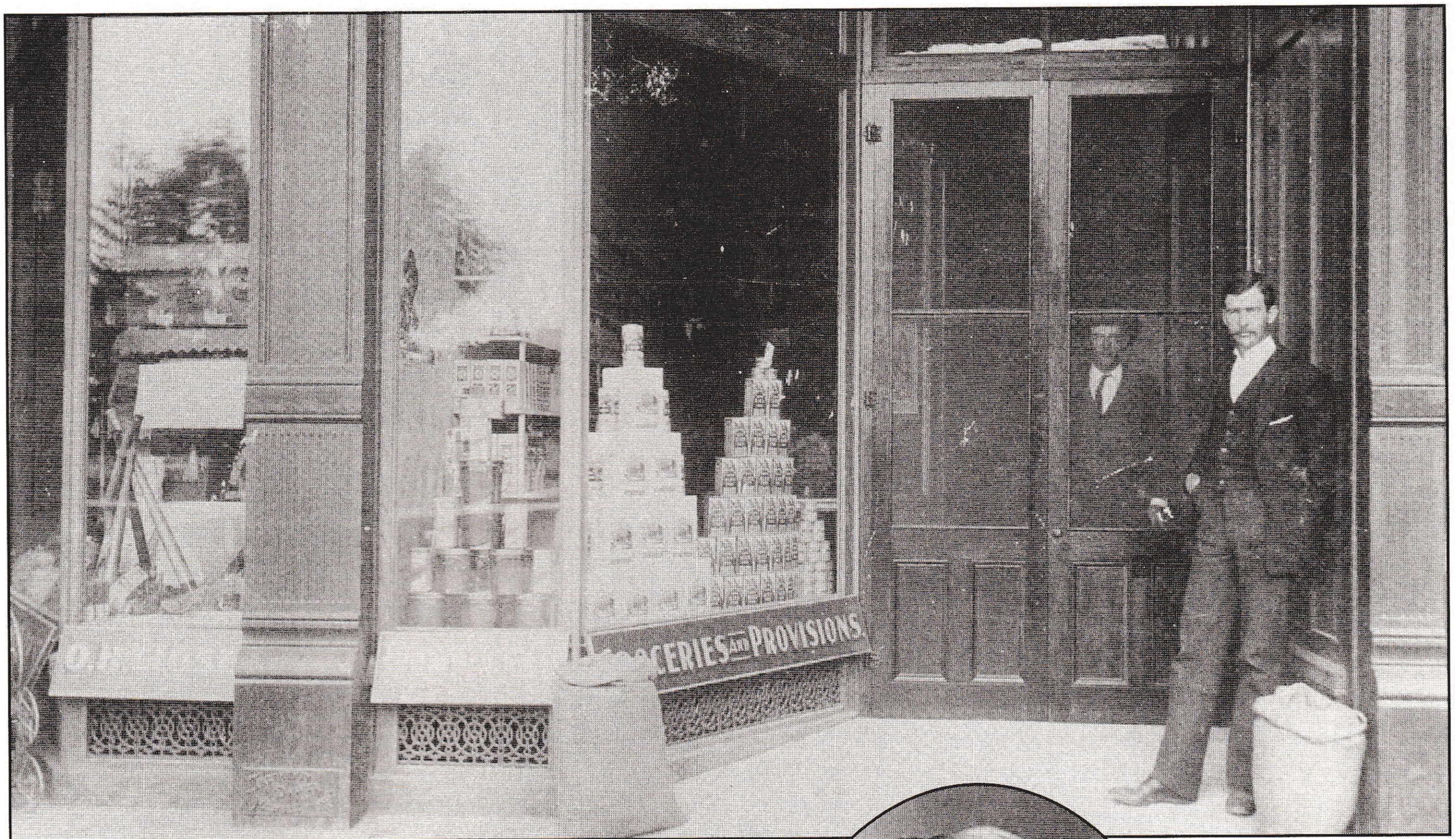
The oldest was Wilson Henry Thompson, born in 1868 near Lawrence, Kansas. His family came to California six years later on a immigration train with five children. In 1877 the father bought 160 acres of land four miles northwest of Woodbridge. Wilson finished his schooling with a three year business degree at the San Joaquin Valley College in 1889. His first job was a clerk for the Bentley's General Merchandise Store in Woodbridge. A year later Thompson was a partner with A.L. Cowell in a hotel and also a general store on the ground floor of the Woodbridge Masonic Temple. At the same time he was a Deputy San Joaquin County Assessor.

W.H. Thompson married Mary Fowler, daughter of Lodi pioneers, Eliza and Joseph Fowler. Four years later they moved to Lodi to start a store with $400 in cash and limited credit.

January 13, 1897 a partnership formed between Wilson Henry Thompson and William Henry Krause of Livingston. They were to share profits equally – buying and selling groceries, provisions and other merchandise on a cash basis.



▲ *Thompson-Beckman Grocery Store on South Sacramento Street. (l to r): Standing: Frank Beckman, Jean Knowles; Sitting: Ed Steacy.*


CERIES AND PROVISIONS.

▲ *Wilson H. Thompson in front of his store, 1897.*

W.H. Thompson ▶

Two months later it was reported that Thompson and Krause, located on Sacramento Street opposite the depot, was selling ten tons of flour each week and C.L. Newton was their salesman. They advertised sweet pickles, prime cheese, potted meats, potted fish and preserved fruits.

The partnership of Thompson and Krause didn't last very long as in 1898 Frank W. Beckman purchased the grocery store of William H. Krause who had been a partner of W.H. Thompson.

Frank William Beckman was born July 27, 1874, two miles south of Lodi, the third son of Henry H. and Margaret Beckman. He graduated from San Joaquin Valley College in 1893, and completed one year at Stanford University before having eye trouble.

Events changed very fast and W.H. Thompson, an insurance agent in 1900, became a partner with O.H. Close in a groceries and provisions store at the corner of Pine and Sacramento Streets.

Frank Beckman was sole owner of his store at this time on South Sacramento Street opposite the old (1869) train depot. W.A. Spooner and E.A. Thompson, Henry's brother, were clerks and Hilliard Welch, the recorder.

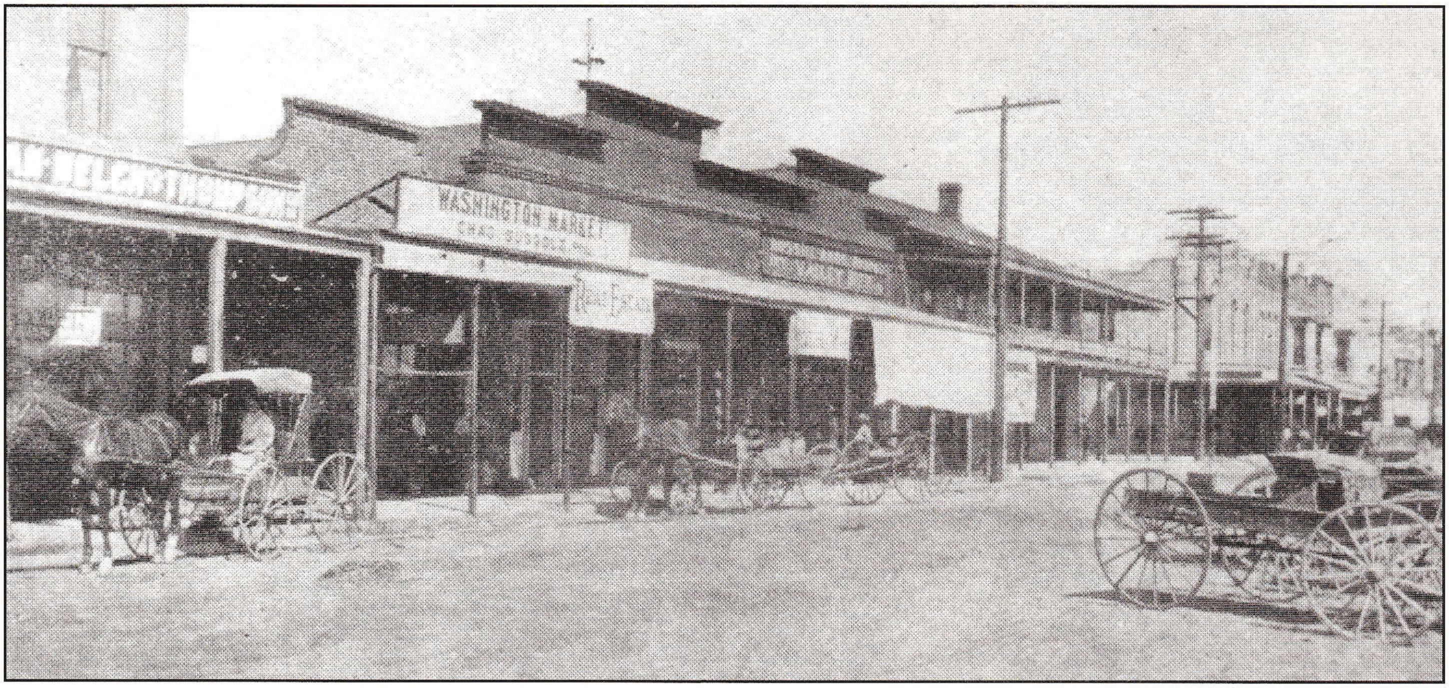
The newspaper announced on April 8, 1900 that Thompson and Beckman were successors to Frank W. Beckman. Their motto was "Live and Let Live," with fresh groceries at reasonable prices.

Just two years later Thompson is out and Frank W. Beckman sold a half interest in his store to Murray Beattie of Santa Clara. An experienced groceryman, Beattie moved to Lodi with his family. Alfred Wallace is a new clerk for the partners.

Beckman and Beattie placed a bell with a rope attached in front of the store so that customers could drive up, pull the rope and a clerk would rush out and take their orders while they remained seated in their wagon.

At about the same time W.H. Thompson orders lumber and bricks for his new building to be erected on the next lot south of the Beckman and Beattie Store, which now is advertising a full line of elegant crockery. Hilliard E. Welch is the head bookkeeper for Beckman and Beattie.

As soon as Thompson finished his new building it is combined with the Beckman store to form the



▲ *Beckman, Welch & Thompson store on left, Sacramento Street between Oak and Pine Streets.*

Beckman, Beattie and Thompson Company. The three men also own a store in Woodbridge where a telephone has been connected to "barbed wire" phone lines so that their farmer customers can order their groceries by phone. The Lodi store has its own phone book of over 250 subscribers. It was printed by the Lodi Sentinel and distributed free to store customers. At this time the Lillie Bros. Phone Company was charging dwellings $1.25 a month and business houses $1.50 a month for service.

The Woodbridge store was sold to cousins Charles and George Rutledge.

The Lodi partners increased their stock by purchasing the inventory of McCleary and Williams who were retiring from their grocery, clothing and hardware business.

Henry Thompson married Celia Crocker December 1903 and on July 12th of the next year Hilliard E. Welch was married to Ruby Steacy, and elected to become the new partner, replacing Beattie. It was then that the store incorporated with a capitol stock of $40,000.

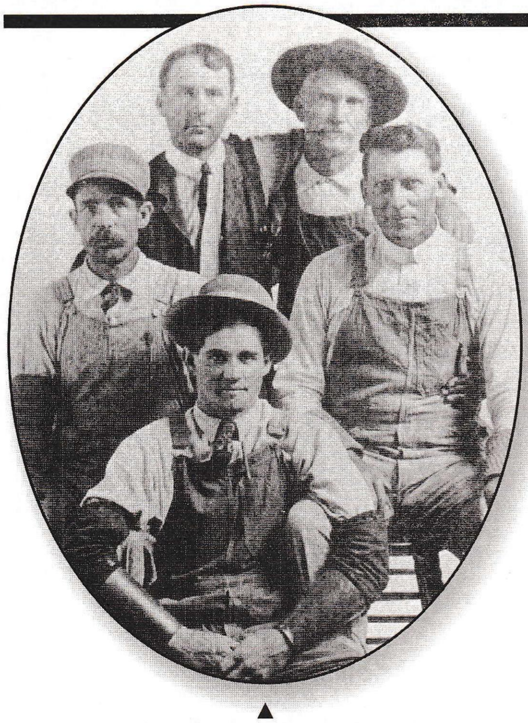
Doctor Hull rented six rooms

FRANK W. BECKMAN.
CASH-GROCER.

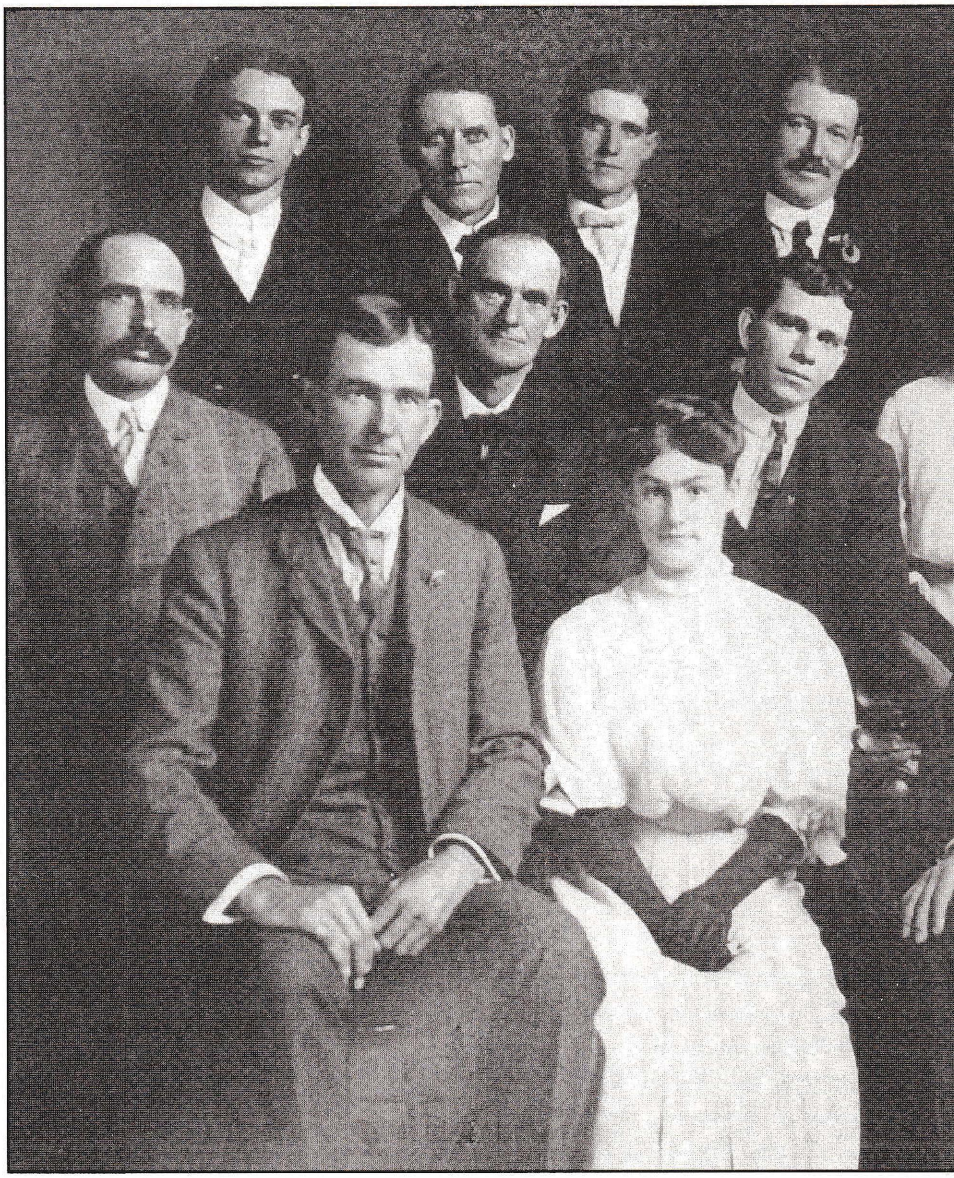
▲ *Adding space to the Beckman, Welch & Thompson Store in 1902.*

W. BECKMAN.
CASH-GROCER.

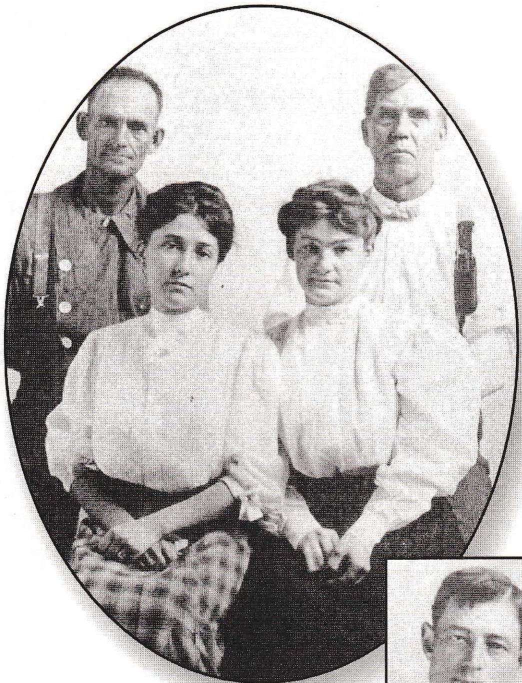
▲ *1902; W.H. Thompson about to build south of the Frank Beckman property.*



▲
A. Westfall, W. Shank, McClure and Clark.

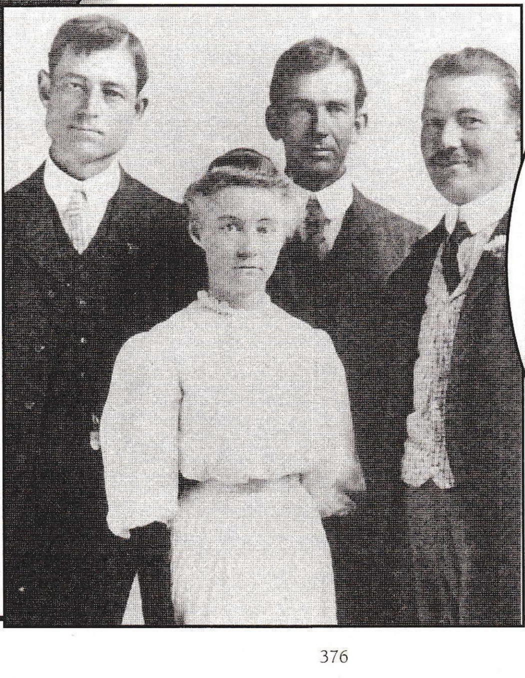


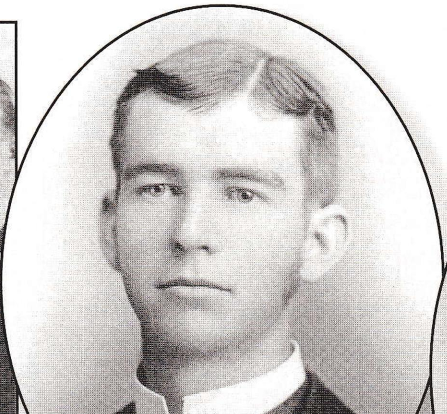
▲ 1906; Bottom row (l to r): W.H. Thompson, B.G. Lore, Frank Beckman, Miss Donald, and H.E. We
unknown. Top row (l to r): Unknown, Clark, unknown, Murphy, Chester Welch, unknown, unknown,



▲
Standing: Bewling, McBaid,
Sitting: Mia Wilson, B. Kilgore.

H.E. Welch, W.H. Thompson, ►
Murphy, and Miss Donald.





▲
W.H. Thompson

John M

h. Second row (l to r): A. Westfall, Bowling, John Montgomery, Mia Wilson, W. Whitaker, Paul Koch, and
V. Shank and McBaid.

▲

Standing: W. Whitaker, Frank Beckman.
Sitting: Peters, Floyd Shank.

▲

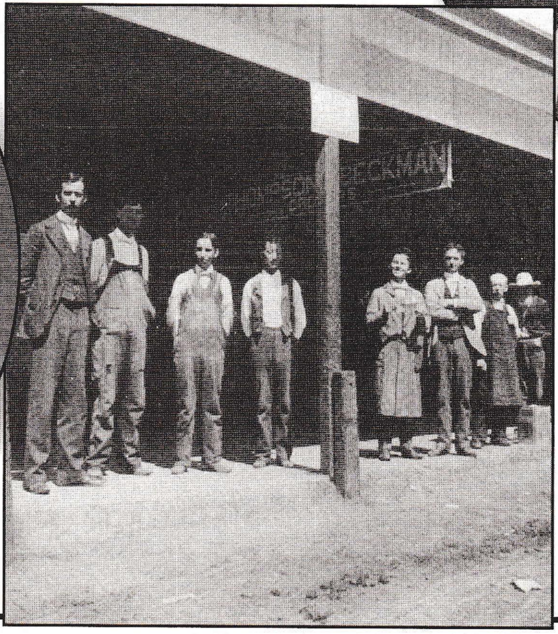
Standing: Chester Welch, unknown.
Sitting: John Montgomery, Paul Koch.

ntgomery

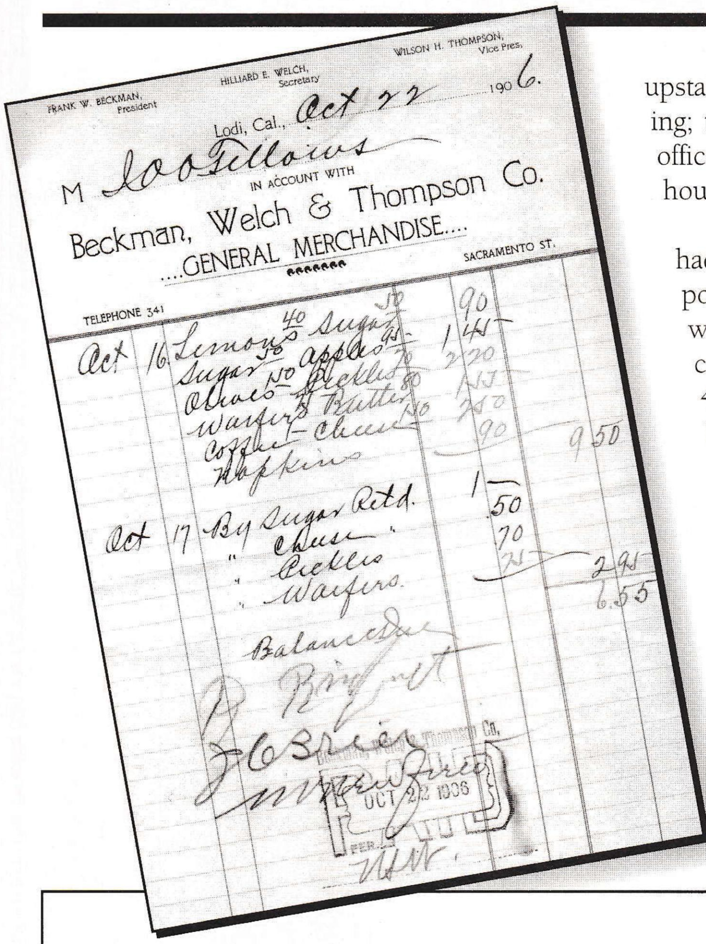
▼

▲

Hilliard Welch



◄ *Thompson Beckman Store in 1900.*
l to r: Wilson Thompson, Hilliard Welch, Edwin Steacy, Jean Hogan, Jean Knowles, Frank Beckman, Adam Brehm, and Mr. Cooper.



FRANK W. BECKMAN, President HILLIARD E. WELCH, Secretary WILSON H. THOMPSON, Vice Pres.

Lodi, Cal., Oct 22 1906.

M I O O Fellows

IN ACCOUNT WITH

Beckman, Welch & Thompson Co.

....GENERAL MERCHANDISE....

TELEPHONE 341 SACRAMENTO ST.

Oct	16	Lemons 40 Sugar 50	90	
		Sugar 50 apples 95	1 45	
		Olives 50 Pickles 70	2 20	
		Wafers 35 Butter 80	1 15	
		Coffee Cheese 50	2 50	
		Napkins	90	9 50
Oct	17	By Sugar Retd.	1 —	
		" Cheese "	50	
		" Pickles	70	
		" Wafers.	75	2 95
				6 55

Balance due

Rec'd payt

Beckman, Welch & Thompson Co.

OCT 22 1906

PER N.W.

upstairs in the store building; two rooms for an office, and four rooms for housekeeping.

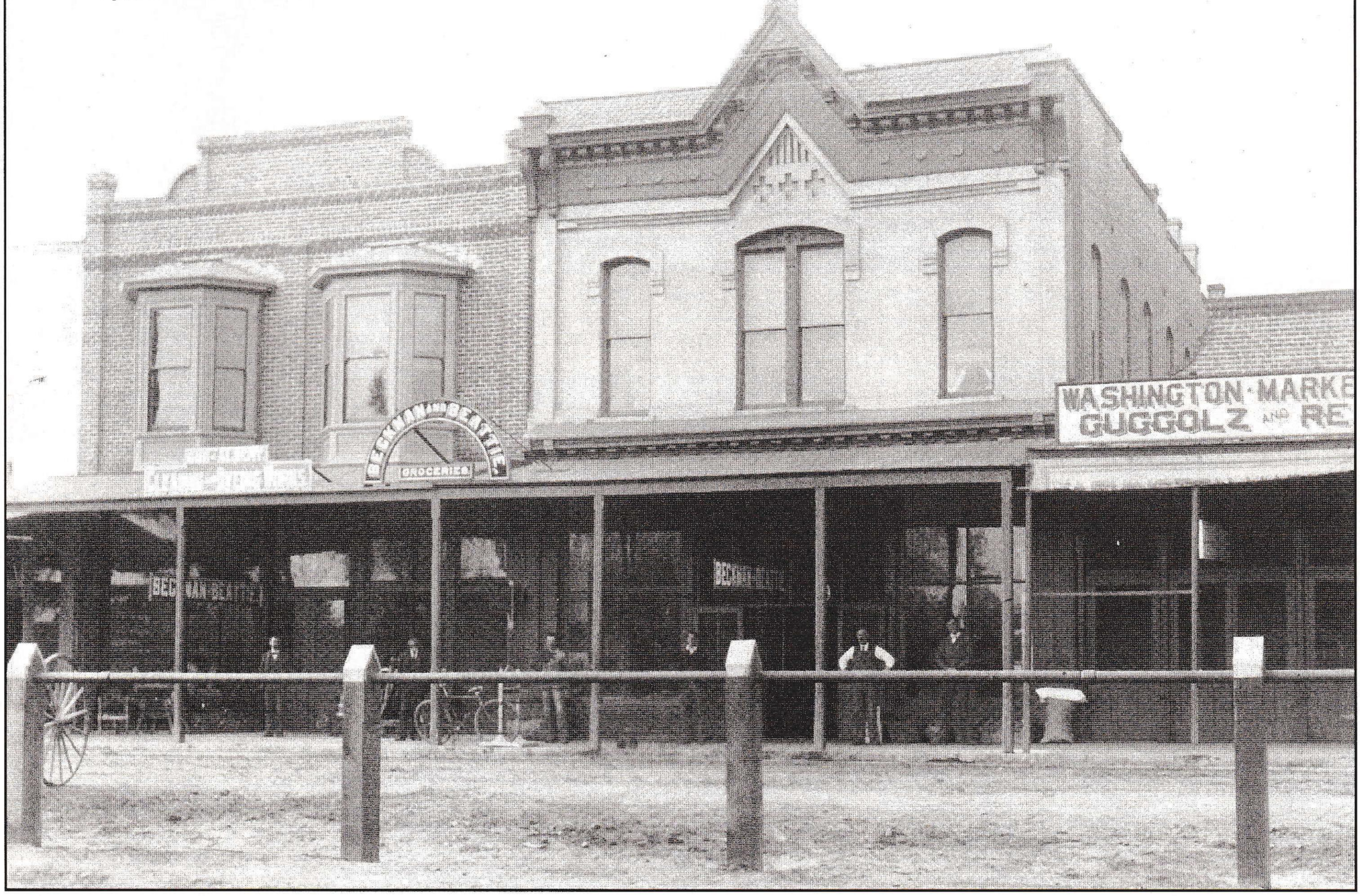
Food prices in 1904 had sugar at 5 cents per pound, creamery butter was 2 pounds for 45 cents, pink salmon was 4 cans for 25 cents and hams were 12-1/2 cents per pound.

The owners of the store hired good help. John Montgomery started working for Beckman, Welch and Thompson when he moved to Lodi in 1904. He became a director later, started his own business, became a Lodi City Council member and served as mayor in 1922.

W.H. Thompson was also manager of the Frank H. Buck Fruit Co. Frank Beckman started the Lodi Relief Society; H.E. Welch became director of the Lodi National Bank and Thompson was vice president of the board.

It was a sad time for Lodi people when on May 23, 1907 Frank W. Beckman passed away at the age of 32. Frank's wife, Addine (LeMoin) Beckman became a partner and Frank's brother, Theodore was elected vice president; W.H. Thompson, president; and H.E. Welch, secretary.

The Beckman, Welch and Thompson competition included Keagle Bros. at 101 East Pine Street, Valley Fruit Co., located on the first



▲ *Beckman-Beattie in 1903, after opening the new addition; owners and employees standing in front of the store.*

floor of the Lodi Opera House, and Hong Quong, 16 South Main Street. Two years later Keagle, Steele and Keagle replaced the Valley Fruit Company, and the Kaufman, Peerless and Jensen's German Cash Store was added.

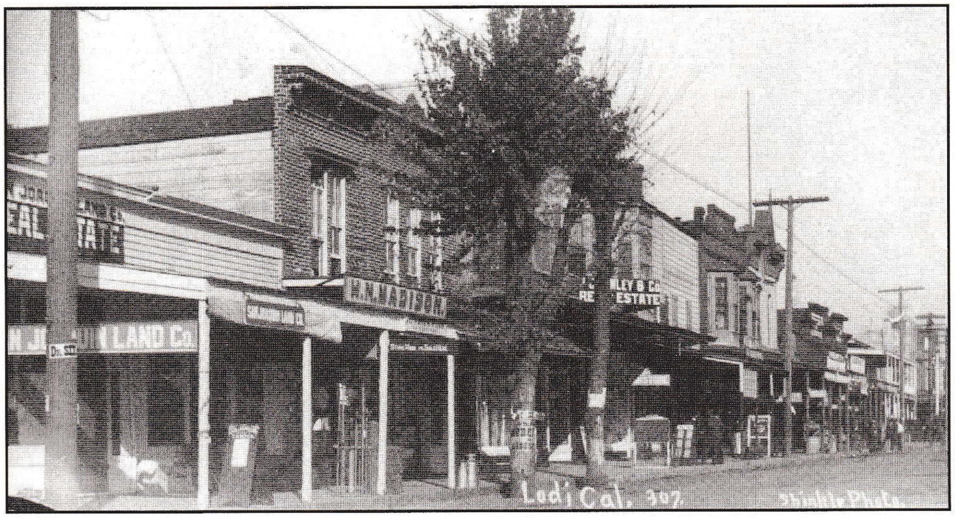
The Beckman, Welch and Thompson Company had a large barn on West Locust Street to house the seven horses and delivery wagons it required to keep up with the times. In late 1909 you could see the store had a large box fastened to the back of an auto that was filled with groceries for delivery.

Business was expanding in the hardware and farm implement department. In 1910 Beckman, Welch and Thompson started the remodeling of their store front. It was a good year for the partners as well. W.H. Thompson, director of Lodi First National Bank, helped establish the Pacific Fruit Exchange and became manager of its Lodi District. H.E. Welch was the new Lodi Fire Chief, president of the Lodi Merchants Association and the following year, president of the Bank of Lodi.

The store would expand west across the alley with a new building that had a concrete floor for hardware and implements.

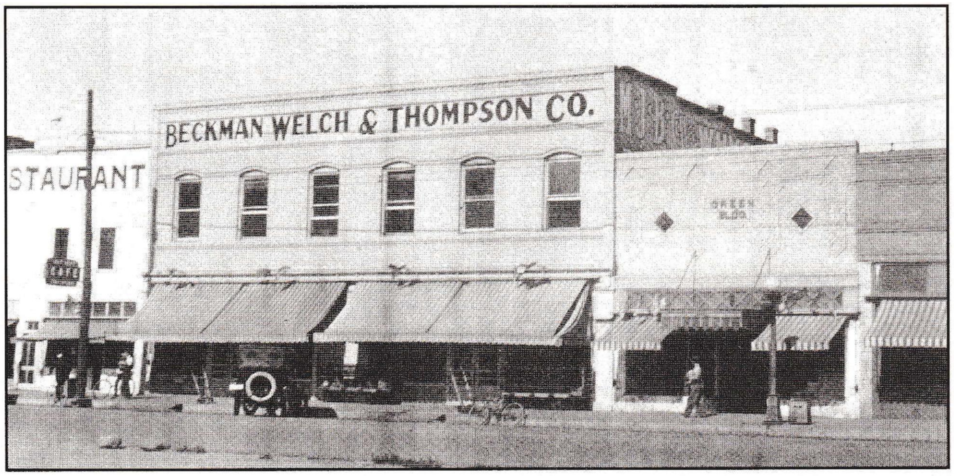
The store was the largest in Lodi during this period. The war with Germany had a large effect on our town due to our large German population. Hilliard Welch was the person selected to deliver a forceful speech before a large crowd at the Tokay Theater stating the reason for the war on September, 1917 and again ten months later, he was selected for speaker for the large celebration of returning Lodi veterans.

Wilson H. Thompson also served during the war as chairman of the Federal Fuel Administration of California. The store also had to participate by selling an equal amount of substitute flour for each purchase of white flour.



▲ *The heart of the Lodi real estate business, Beckman's Store in the middle of the block, prior to 1907.*

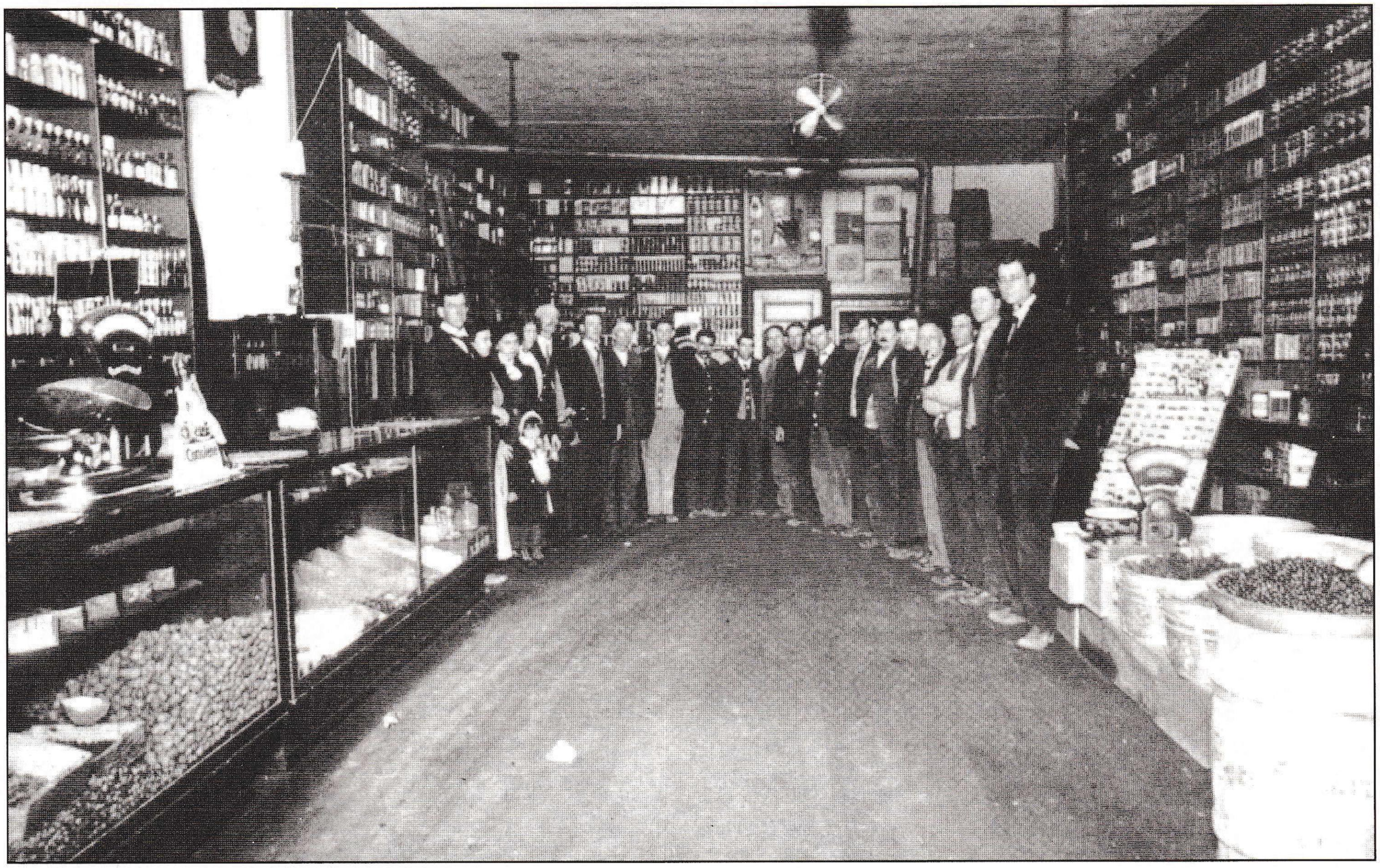
▲ *Sacramento Street, between Oak and Pine Streets, after 1907.*



▲ *July 1, 1919; Beckman, Welch & Thompson store after remodel; green building with a white front.*

Charles A. Black, another member of the City of Lodi Trustees, came on board in 1915. By this time the store was called just Beckman's.

The owners are involved with the progress of Lodi as all three were named as directors of local banks. They helped start the Board of Trade that became the Lodi Chamber of Commerce.



▲ *Inside the Beckman, Welch & Thompson Store, circa 1908; Thompson on left and Welch on right.*

Thompson was president of the Lodi Investment Company that erected the Hotel Lodi. Thompson sold his interests in the Beckman, Welch and Thompson Company in 1918 and invested his money in purchasing the two southern corners of School and Oak Streets, and building large buildings that were used as the J.C. Penney Store on the east and the Sam Zimmerman Drug Store, plus offices on the west, including the new Post Office.

At this time the Beckman Store business was one of the largest general mercantile companies in the county. They were selling "wear-ever" aluminum pot-roast kettles that needed neither water nor basting for $1.98.

In late December 1921, the Beckman, Welch and Thompson Company was sold. Charles B. Pearson, John B. Wilkes and Walter I. Minahen of Stockton purchased the large grocery department. The Stockton Hardware and Implement Company took the hardware line. The old firm retained the same space upstairs for real estate loans and other interests.

The store continued to prosper but when the chain grocery stores came to Lodi they provided a lot of competition.

Beckman's, with Minahen as manager, continued through 1929 before closing. The Stockton Hardware and Implement Company enlarged in 1930 with P.A. Athern, Manager, and changed its name to Turner Hardware and Implement Company with the same manager.

In 1938 Turner's moved to a new building at 116 W. Pine Street. The old store was remodeled by Jack Graffigna and in 1940 Henderson Bros. moved from North Sacramento to the old Beckman, Welch and Thompson store at 21-25 South Sacramento Street.

REFERENCES & CREDITS

The scrap books of Celia Thompson, wife of Wilson Henry Thompson, located in the California Room of the Lodi Public Library.

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